

FEDERAL HIGHWAY ADMINISTRATION
FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT

for

Project Number: MT (009)
Project Name: Billings – Airport Road
Control Number: 4743

in

City of Billings
Yellowstone County, Montana

THE FEDERAL HIGHWAY ADMINISTRATION HAS DETERMINED THAT THE “*PREFERRED*” ALTERNATIVE FOR THIS PROPOSED PROJECT AS DESCRIBED IN THE ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT DATED OCTOBER 2005 WILL HAVE NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT ON THE HUMAN ENVIRONMENT. THIS *FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT* IS BASED ON THE ATTACHED ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT WHICH HAS BEEN INDEPENDENTLY EVALUATED BY THE FEDERAL HIGHWAY ADMINISTRATION AND DETERMINED TO ADEQUATELY AND ACCURATELY DISCUSS THE NEED, ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES, AND IMPACTS OF THE PROPOSED PROJECT AND APPROPRIATE MITIGATION MEASURES. IT PROVIDES SUFFICIENT EVIDENCE AND ANALYSIS FOR DETERMINING THAT AN ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT STATEMENT IS NOT REQUIRED. THE FHWA TAKES FULL RESPONSIBILITY FOR THE ACCURACY, SCOPE, AND CONTENT OF THE ATTACHED ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT.


Federal Highway Administration

01/31/2006
Date

Project Abstract and Location:

The project is located along Montana 3/Airport Road from approximately the Billings Logan International Airport east to Main Street. The purpose of the project is to update the roadway facilities and intersections with designs that are more consistent with current design standards and projected travel demand.

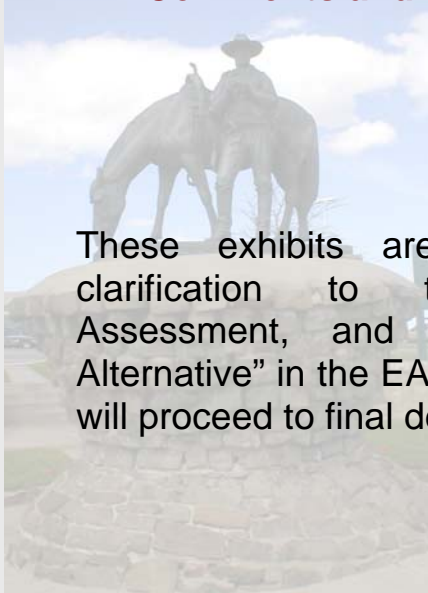
EXHIBITS

A – NEPA/MEPA Coordination Process

B – Clarification of Roundabout Design Concept

C – Errata Sheet

D – Comments and Responses



These exhibits are included to provide further clarification to the attached Environmental Assessment, and to identify MDT's "Preferred Alternative" in the EA as the "Selected Alternative" that will proceed to final design and construction.

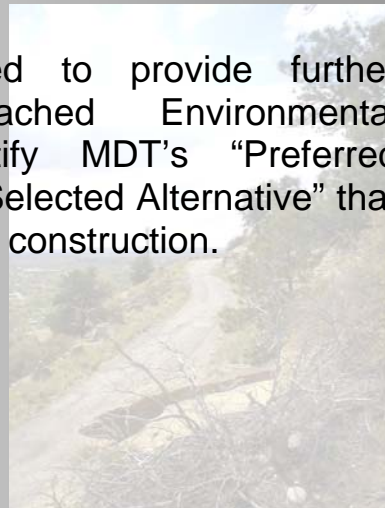


Exhibit A – NEPA/MEPA Coordination Process

The proposed project outlined in the attached Environmental Assessment (EA) has been coordinated with the appropriate federal, state, and local agencies in compliance with the requirements of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and the Montana Environmental Policy Act (MEPA), as well as guidelines provided by the Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ) and the U.S. Department of Transportation (FHWA Technical Advisory T6640.8A).

Availability of EA for Review and Comment

The Montana Department of Transportation (MDT) and the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) approved the EA for distribution in October 2005, and a Notice of Availability was published in area newspapers as follows:

- Yellowstone County News on November 17th and 24th
- Billings Gazette on November 20th and 27th

An individual mailer was also sent out to 167 people who had either attended previous public meetings or expressed an interest in the project.

Copies of the EA were available for public review at the following locations:

- MDT – Billings District Office
- Billings Public Works Department
- Billings Public Library

Copies of the EA were also available upon request from MDT and the EA could be viewed on the MDT website at http://www.mdt.mt.gov/pubinvolve/eis_ea.shtml.

The EA was mailed to all agencies contained on the Distribution List on pages 45 and 46 of the EA on November 4, 2005. The public review and comment period began on November 7, 2005 and ended on December 21, 2005.

Additional copies of the EA were mailed to private individuals upon their request.

Public Hearing

A formal Public Hearing was held to present the Preferred Alternative and take comments on the EA. The Hearing was held on November 30, 2005 in the Ralston/Remington Ballrooms in the Student Union Building on the MSU-Billings campus. Sixteen people were in attendance, and no written comments were received. A transcript of the Hearing is available upon request.

Comments Received

Three verbal comments were received at the Hearing, and 15 were submitted in writing during the comment period. Those comments and the official response from MDT and FHWA are contained in Exhibit D, following.

Exhibit B – Clarification of the Modern Roundabout Design Concept

Upon review of the comments received on the Environmental Assessment (EA), it appears that there may be some general confusion about the proposed intersection design at the junction of Montana Highway 3 (MT 3) and Airport Road, at the Billings Logan International Airport. The following information is provided to clarify the intent to construct a modern roundabout at this intersection and supply additional background information on what this intersection concept entails. Common misperceptions are discussed in the following sections.

Modern Roundabouts are not the same as “traffic circles”

A modern roundabout is not the same as the older-style rotary traffic circle like those found in some east coast and European cities. Although the United States was home to the first one-way rotary system in the world (implemented around New York City's Columbus Circle in 1904), traffic circles had fallen out of favor in this country by the 1950s. Older traffic circles, located primarily in the northeastern states, encountered serious operational and safety problems, including the tendency to lock up at higher volumes.

Based in large part on this country's experience with the older and existing traffic circles built prior to 1990, the modern roundabout has been notably less popular in the United States than abroad. The modern roundabout has been successful in several countries in Europe and Australia, where the roundabout has changed the practice of intersection design. Just in the last decade, communities in the United States have experimented with the modern roundabout, and based on their success, a growing interest in roundabout development across the country has evolved.

The main difference between older style traffic circles and roundabouts is in how traffic enters the circle and which vehicle has the right-of-way. With roundabouts, drivers wishing to enter the circle must yield to vehicles already in the circle. With many of the older traffic circles, drivers inside the circle must yield to the vehicles entering the circle. Roundabouts can be designed to handle fire trucks, buses, and various sizes of emergency vehicles, as well as truck and trailer combinations. To accommodate these larger vehicles, the center island of a roundabout is often built with a gradually sloped and flat curb, called a truck apron. This apron makes it easier for long vehicles to make the turns as demonstrated in the photo at right.



Roundabouts: An Informational Guide

U.S. Department of Transportation, Federal Highway Administration
Publication No. FHWA-RD-00-067.

To provide further background and information, the following has been excerpted from the FHWA roundabout guide:

Roundabouts have been demonstrated to be generally safer for motor vehicles and pedestrians than other forms of at-grade intersections. (p. 23)

If achieved by good design, then in principle, lower vehicle speeds should provide the following safety benefits:

- Reduce crash severity for pedestrians and bicyclists, including older pedestrians, children, and impaired persons;
- Provide more time for entering drivers to judge, adjust speed for, and enter a gap in circulating traffic;
- Allow safer merges into circulating traffic;
- Provide more time for all users to detect and correct for their mistakes or mistakes of others;
- Make the intersection safer for novice users. (p. 24)
- Reduce in severity or eliminate many severe conflicts that are present in traditional intersections. (p. 25)

Compared to signalized intersections, a roundabout does not have signal equipment that requires constant power, periodic light bulb and detection maintenance, and regular signal timing updates. Roundabouts, however, can have higher landscape maintenance costs, depending on the degree of landscaping provided on the central island, splitter islands, and perimeter. Illumination costs for roundabouts and signalized intersections are similar. Drivers sometimes face a confusing situation when they approach a signalized intersection during a power failure, but such failures have minimal temporary effect on roundabouts other than the possible loss of illumination. The service life of a roundabout is significantly longer, approximately 25 years, compared with 10 years for a typical signal. (p. 30)

Roundabouts offer the opportunity to provide attractive entries or centerpieces to communities. The portions of the central island and, to a lesser degree, the splitter islands that are not subject to sight-distance requirements offer opportunities for aesthetic landscaping. Some are exhibited as a “signature” feature on community postcards, advertisements, and travelogues. (p. 30)

Costs associated with roundabouts include construction costs, engineering and design fees, land acquisition, and maintenance costs. Benefits may include reduced crash rates and severity, reduced delay, stops, fuel consumption, and vehicle emissions. . . .

At new sites, and at signalized intersections that require widening at one or more approaches to provide additional turn lanes, a roundabout can be a comparable or less expensive alternative. (p. 36)

[A] proposal to install a roundabout may initially experience a negative public reaction. However, the history of the first few roundabouts installed in the United States also indicates that the public attitude toward roundabouts improves significantly after construction. A recent survey conducted of jurisdictions across the United States reported a significant negative public attitude toward roundabouts prior to construction (68 percent of the responses were negative or very negative), but a positive attitude after construction (73 percent of the responses were positive or very positive). (p. 40)

The preceding material was excerpted from various websites relating to roundabout designs. The complete resources can be referenced at the following sites:

AAA – Foundation for Traffic Safety: www.aaafoundation.org
Alaska Roundabouts: www.alaskaroundabouts.com
City of Scottsdale: www.ci.scottsdale.az.us/Traffic/Roundabouts
City of Dublin, Ohio: www.dublin.oh.us/city/deptdev/engineer/roundabouts
Wisconsin DOT: www.dot.wisconsin.gov/safety/motorist/roaddesign/roundabout-design.htm
Washington DOT: www.wsdot.wa.gov/Projects/roundabouts
Kansas State University: www.k-state.edu/roundabouts
KY Community Transp. Innovation: www.ktc.uky.edu/Reports/Roundabout_Guide.pdf
Federal Highway Administration: www.tfhrc.gov/pubrds/fall95/p95a41

Exhibit C – Errata Sheet

The following text edits are part of the official Environmental Assessment (EA) prepared for this project and are intended to provide further clarification on the scope and intent of the proposed action by the Montana Department of Transportation (MDT) and the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA).

The edits are indicated by their location in the EA document, the type of edit made, and a depiction of the edit made to the text.

<u>Location</u>	<u>Action</u>	<u>Edit</u>
Page 5, Line 1	Text correction	“... has the right-of-way. As depicted in Figure 3-1 Figure 1-3 , peak hour capacity analysis conducted by a . . .”
Page 34, Paragraph 1, Lines 1, 2, and 3	Editorial change	“Both prehistoric sites (24YL1606 and 24YL1607) yielded lithic debitage, stone tools, bison bone, and heat altered rock. Site 24YL1606 is within the bounds of the City’s proposed project, and has been avoided with a re-design effort. Site 24YL1607 is protected by Section 106 and Section 4(f) of the . . .”
Page 34, Paragraph 1, Line 4	Text clarification	“... Transportation Act and impacts would be mitigated by this project if approved by FHWA and MDT, and concurred by SHPO . Techniques used . . .”
Page 45, Right Column, 4 th Address	Address correction	Montana Highway Commission 2037 Ridgeview Drive 902 Parkhill Drive Billings, MT 59105-3636 59101 Attn: William T. Kennedy, Chairman

Exhibit D – Comments and Responses

The following pages contain an abbreviated transcript of the Public Hearing, as well as copies of the comment letters received (on the left side of the page), and the FHWA/MDT response (on the right side of the page). Comment letters are presented in date-order, and each is numbered sequentially. The response to each letter is identified with the number corresponding to the comment.

The following comments and responses have been transcribed from the Public Hearing held on the EA on November 30, 2005.

Recorded Comment: A

Thank you! My name is Charlie Yegen and I have a couple of questions. One has to do with the new entrance to Swords Park. Terri mentioned that there is a left turn bay, will there also be a turning lane on the right-hand side to allow access in without balling up the two lanes of traffic east, a right-turn bay into the new Swords Park access?
This is the first question.

The second question is has there been any discussion with regard to extension of public services across the project at least in terms of being able to provide services or something from Alkali Creek to the Swords Park, which undoubtedly at some point or other will be developed. That question is based on that old notion that we all have that as soon as a new street comes in that it is time to tear it up and put in some sort of infra structure improvement. My question is has there been any discussion of that to coordinate with as for instance the underpass for the pipe, pedestrian multi-use paths or just generally if that has been discussed?

Recorded Comment: B

Are those remaining pathways and an improved right-of-way for packing snow out to the city property and park property?

Recorded Response: A

Right now, Charlie, there is not a separate right-turn lane contemplated to access Swords Park. It is a 4-lane facility, so right-turn vehicles really shouldn't impact or be in the way for through traffic.

On the utility extension question, the City of Billings has commented to us already that they would like to include utility extensions up Airport Road from kind of the vicinity of Alkali Creek Road. They would like to extend those up Alkali Creek Road about to the exit of the park property up there. So we really haven't talked with them about that, so it is kind of a final design thing, but they have already gone on record with us saying that they would like to extend water and sewer up there.

Recorded Response: B

The question was would utilities actually be stuck into the park property. The answer is it is too early to tell. They have basically gone on record saying they want to extend them and contact us when we start a detailed design so we can work those things out, and so we didn't do that one way or another.

Recorded Comment: C

I guess my main question is why the delay? This thing is going to be taking eight years to get under way from when we first got our money? I believe she said that we got \$15 million in the year 2000. It is an existing road. I understand that you have to do some environmental stuff but eight years seems like a long time to me.

Recorded Response: C

We have spent an inordinate amount of time and a lot of detailed design in the alternatives because of the complexity of each of these alternatives for both the Airport Road and Alkali Creek. We probably spent considerably more time in detailed designs of the alternatives and the property than we do on most projects that don't have this level of complexity or these two complex intersections in this close proximity together. So that was one thing that drove quite a little time. From the time we got the money, we were not able to start any work on the project, other than to say through the Policy Coordinating Committee in Billings that this is the project, it is important to us and the PCC rated it as a number one priority and Shiloh was number two although I guess locally they both are urban planning, but we had to draw the line. At the time when we first put this into the plan, we had \$3.8 million and then we started the project process with that which requires project nomination, approval by the Montana Transportation Commission, inclusion in the state-local transportation plan, inclusion in the state transportation plan and all of that takes time. Usually when we receive the money, we already have the project nominated and have pretty well decided through the preliminary field reviews the kind of work we want to do on the job, and spent significant time on such things as developing utilities. In this case, we almost have gotten the money before we developed the project. That is the best information I can come up with. On the average, the project with the environmental assessment under the states statewide, we are somewhere in the five to eight year range to be where we are at.

Recorded Comment: D

So with this meeting, we are done with the environmental process? Is that correct? Then you go into the design phase from here?

Recorded Comment: E

So if you were able to get right-of-ways taken care of, is it possible that construction could begin before your projection of 2007?

Recorded Response: D

Based on everything we know today, we will be able to conclude this project with a "Finding of No Significant Impact." If there are issues that come up as a result of tonight's meeting that would drive us to a higher level environmental document which is a full scale Environmental Impact Statement, then we would go into the EIS which would probably take somewhere in the neighborhood of 48 months to complete. But we see nothing at this point that would drive us to an EIS. In fact, based on what we have heard so far, I would say we could conclude this with a "Finding of No Significant Impact," and that will happen real expeditiously after we get done here.

Recorded Response: E

Our intent if we can complete the forms right after the first of the year, the final design, the right-of-way, utility relocations and preconstruction, and we are anticipating construction today on the basis of the plans we have at the first of the year in 2007. I guess I should point out that the only thing we are not designing during the environmental process is to satisfy the needs of that process. It varies by project to somewhere, I am going to say, 20 to 50% of the design of the roadway to satisfy the . We are a long way ahead of the design now as far as the alternatives are considered because we have a lot of engineering detail and time put into the four alternatives, so those will go real quickly, but you still have all the Airport Road planning, Main Street planning, the Alkali Creek planning as well as the segment in front of the airport. The primary time has been spent to access what the impacts in front of the airport.

Recorded Comment: F

How much design have you completed from Alkali Creek Road?

Recorded Response: F

The design between Alkali Creek and Main Street is part of the core. Basically we have a preliminary design all the way from Main Street to the west side of the airport intersection.

Recorded Comment: G

So what is the best way to get specifics on some of the design?

Recorded Response: G

The best way to get specifics is to stop and chat with us. We have got some information. Our office is staffed constantly.

The following comments were submitted in writing to MDT during the public comment period on the EA.

Comment # 1

From: Bruner, Heidy [hbruner@mt.gov]
Sent: Thursday, December 22, 2005 10:27 AM
To: Darryl James (E-mail)
Subject: FW: Comment on Billings Airport Road EA

-----Original Message-----

From: Ed Gulick [mailto:edgulick47@alum.pomona.edu]
Sent: Friday, November 25, 2005 5:15 PM
To: MDT EIS Comments Blg Airport
Cc: djames@hkminc.com
Subject: Comment on Billings Airport Road EA

Dear MDT,

I approve of the Preferred Alternative for the Billings Airport Road EA. The roundabout with (2) bypasses appears to be the best solution for the site conditions. I also appreciate the consideration given to bicyclists and pedestrians.

Thank you for your consideration.

Regards,
Ed Gulick

907 North 25th Street
Billings, MT 59101

(406) 259-7618 (H)
(406) 896-0250 (W)

Response # 1

Comment noted. No response necessary.

Comment # 2

From: tom wilde [tomwilde2008@yahoo.com]
Sent: Tuesday, November 29, 2005 8:05 AM
To: mdteiscommentsblgair@mt.gov
Cc: djames@hkminc.com
Subject: Airport Road

Any consideration to perhaps a people mover or tram from the airport to downtown Billings, thus having a parking garage center downtown and possibly a hotel/convention center. It works at ski resorts and major airports. It may be worth a thought, the logistics of the airport road are kindof like trying to get a camel through a needle.

Such a project would require additional Federal aid, and could be a model project for transportation.

Response # 2

Comment noted.

As you note, this would be a separate project.

Comment # 3

From: Paul Whiting [paulwhiting@bresnan.net]
Sent: Tuesday, November 29, 2005 9:23 AM
To: mdteiscommentsblgair@mt.gov
Cc: djames@hkminc.com
Subject: Comment on Billings Airport Road EA

Attachments: mtns2plnse.jpg; allthatise.jpg; beautn2e.jpg; beautn1e.jpg; ATT04059.txt

    
mtns2plnse.jpg (70 KB) allthatise.jpg (85 KB) beautn2e.jpg (77 KB) beautn1e.jpg (77 KB) ATT04059.txt (92 B)

My comment has to do with the billboards mentioned at the bottom of p. 34. Actually, I believe there are three boards, and when you count the number of faces on each board, the visual impact on the Rims is significant. Most people in Billings, when asked what the city's most important scenic resources are, will name the Yellowstone River and the Rims. Yet a visitor might not know that these Rims are treasured when looking at these intrusive blights perched along the base. And actually, there's one more, about halfway along the road heading East from the airport toward Billings Heights.

Please make every effort to find a way to eliminate these billboards. I was told a while back that there was something like CTEP money available for this purpose. Could that be so?

Attached are some photos illustrating my point. Note the irony in the messages on these signs!

Thank you,

Paul Whiting

Comment # 4

From: Keith Ratcliff [ratcliff3320@bresnan.net]
Sent: Thursday, December 01, 2005 6:03 PM
To: mdteiscommentsblgair@mt.gov
Cc: djames@hkminc.com
Subject: Comment on Billings Airport Road EA

I have had to use round-a-bouts when traveling through some southern states, as well as new one added a few years ago in St. George, UT.

The first time it was confusing. I had never seen one before. I was driving a large motor home. Changing lanes and merging with traffic was difficult in such a short distance.

Most large trucks, motor homes, large trailers, etc. as well as first time users will have trouble with this type of intersection, especially if they need to merge across traffic.

The fact that you rarely ever see this type of intersection is proof that they do not work well. This is the wrong type of intersection for this location.

Keith Ratcliff

Phone or Fax #
(406) 656-7126

Response # 3

The billboards are outside the scope and physical limits of the proposed project. MDT would be involved in the relocation of billboards only in the case of a right-of-way conflict. Any action to remove the billboards outside the specified need in this EA would need to be undertaken by the City of Billings under a separate action.

Response # 4

While there may be some initial confusion, the project will include a comprehensive signing and striping plan to clearly inform the driver of how to maneuver through the modern roundabout. MDT will also initiate a public information campaign to educate the public about the change in design and how the modern roundabout operates. MDT intends to post an animation on the web, and informational brochures can be left at kiosks and at rental car counters at the Airport, the Chamber of Commerce and Visitor's Center, as well as at local businesses and area hotels to spread information to Billings-area visitors.

The roundabout has been designed to accommodate truck/trailer movements.

Comment # 5

From: Brooke [brookeflynn@mcn.net]
Sent: Friday, December 02, 2005 1:04 PM
To: mdteiscommentsblgair@mt.gov
Cc: djames@hkminc.com
Subject: Comment on Billings Airport Road EA

Thanks for the opportunity for input on this project. A roundabout is a very poor idea for this rural community.

I have driven from coast to coast and border to border every year for 15 years and have only seen one roundabout, as you come on to the Cape Cod Peninsula, and of course, in Scotland. I can see that a roundabout might be practical for a high traffic area in Massachusetts, but to burden the drivers in our rural state with a roundabout is just asking for, at the least, confusion.

The road east/west road past the airport, Highway 3, is a truck route. Picture a vehicle coming up the airport hill to turn west, a cattle truck, perhaps from Canada, coming west, a stranger to Billings who has just rented a car coming out of the airport and someone, maybe from Cody, in a hurry to catch their flight coming east. Do you really think that throwing an unfamiliar traffic configuration like a roundabout in to this mix is going to help?

Maybe after these drivers have suffered through the roundabout the first time, they will be able to negotiate it the next time, but what an unfriendly thing to do to visitors/shoppers/business people coming to our city. Remember that Billings is also a major medical and shopping hub for the region and, from experience, I can tell you that having really challenging traffic in an area affects whether a visitor wants to come back and spend money again.

I use the airport plenty. The existing intersection is a real challenge and requires careful and observant driving. Better explanatory and directional signs, especially leaving the airport, would help and be a lot cheaper and more sensible than experimenting on the public with a roundabout.

In summary, roundabouts for Billings are a bad idea because:

- 5-a** 1. Our traffic consists not only of Billings residents, but of folks from surrounding rural areas who come here to shop and for medical reasons. Whether they visit regularly or just come "in to town" once in a while, they are going to find roundabouts confusing, intimidating and, unfortunately, dangerous.
- 5-b** 2. A roundabout big enough to accommodate a semi-tractor pulling a triple will take a great deal of land.
- 5-c** 3. A roundabout is a very confusing traffic configuration. No matter how much education is done for local folks, the drivers at the airport intersection are obviously not going to be all locals.
- 5-d** 4. Just because roundabouts work in other parts of the country (I haven't seen them) or in a textbook, doesn't mean they are the solution for a unique place like Montana.
- 5-e** 5. Surely, good signing at the airport and coming up the hill is a better solution and, I hope you get more creative solutions that don't involve a foreign structure like a roundabout.

Brooke Flynn

Response # 5

5-a Roundabouts are one of the safest types of intersections, and are increasingly common in cities of similar size and rural/urban nature as Billings (e.g.: Coralville and Des Moines, Iowa; Lawrence and Topeka, Kansas; Lincoln, Nebraska). According to the *Insurance Institute for Highway Safety*, modern roundabouts reduce motor vehicle crashes. Their July 2001 Status Report noted "most serious kinds of crashes at conventional intersections are virtually eliminated by roundabouts...Crashes that do occur tend to be minor because traffic speeds are slower." The study reviewed 24 intersections around the U.S. that have been converted from stop signs or traffic signals to modern roundabouts. At those intersections, all crashes were reduced by 39%, and serious crashes reduced by 76%. The study also estimates that fatal or incapacitating injuries will be reduced by 90% at those intersections. (See also Comment/Response # 4 above regarding the public information campaign.)

5-b The roundabout has been designed to accommodate truck/trailer movements (including triples), and the impacts disclosed in the EA are based on the footprint of this design concept. No additional lands beyond those already disclosed would be required.

5-c The project will include a comprehensive signing and striping plan to clearly inform the driver of how to maneuver through the intersection. (See also Comment/Response # 4 and # 5-a above.)

5-d There are over 800 such intersections constructed in the United States, with hundreds more planned. Successful examples can be found in western states such as Colorado, Utah, and Washington.

5-e Simply adding signing at the Airport intersection does not address the stated Purpose and Need for the proposed project as noted in the EA. The existing intersection functions poorly and conditions will continue to deteriorate without improvements. Future traffic volumes cannot be accommodated through the addition of signage alone at this intersection.

Comment # 6

From: Jason McGimpsey [jmcgimpsey@aearchitects.com]
Sent: Wednesday, December 07, 2005 10:50 AM
To: mdteiscommentsblgair@mt.gov
Cc: djames@hkminc.com
Subject: Comment on Billings Airport Road EA

Upon review of the EA, there are a couple concerns that I have beyond the idea of a fifteen million dollar expenditure which reduces the aesthetic value of both areas. They are as follows:

- The Airport Road intersection would be the first and only "roundabout" intersection within the City and County. I know of only one other roundabout installation (Jackrabbit Lane, Bozeman) which was a total disaster for tractor/trailer movement and motorist confusion. I believe that it has been since removed. As the airport intersection sees heavy traffic from tractor/trailer rigs, how would safety significantly increase if nobody is familiar with the type of intersection or the functional protocol. The example which is noted within the EA clearly is not a highway application, but at a residential scale. Are there any more suitable examples with more accurate speeds, vehicles, and capacities?

- The Alkali Creek intersection cost significantly outweighs the benefit in my opinion. It takes a relatively simple and functional design and transforms the intersection into a complex series of ramps and flow patterns. It is apparent that the extension of Aronson Lane is a primary reason for this intersection to be modified as this will further increase the load on this intersection. I believe that there has to be a more economical and simple alternative to the option presented. It is also unfortunate that Alkali Creek Road has been transformed from a secondary to a primary route over the last several years for all heights traffic as Main Street is ill-equipped to handle the traffic load.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment.
Jason McGimpsey

Comment # 7

From: Don Olsen [dono@olsenarch.com]
Sent: Wednesday, December 07, 2005 11:30 AM
To: mdteiscommentsblgair@mt.gov
Cc: djames@hkminc.com
Subject: Comment on Billings Airport Road EA

To whom it may concern

The intersection at the airport is one of the most important in the city from a variety of perspectives.

- The general appearance must be given a much higher focus (and related budget) than a typical intersection. This is a gateway to our city from the airport. It will give the first and most lasting impression as to what kind of city we choose to present. Landscaping should be unique but appropriate and drought resistant. Some type of "gateway" element should be included or at least planned for. It should be designed as our "crown" on the rims. This is also highly visible from throughout the city. As such lighting should be shorter than typical with sharp cut off illumination. If the area lighting is relatively invisible the "gateway" mentioned above could have higher prominence.
- It is also important that pedestrians and bicyclists be given consideration. Some type of sheltered or protected passage from one side to the other is critical. Being "trapped" out in the middle of a roundabout with semis, etc circling will not be a pleasant experience. Nor will having to cross through traffic twice. It would require a very long tunnel which would be somewhat unpleasant as well. Perhaps a bridge that stays as low profile as possible so it does not "stick up" when viewed from the valley.

Thanks for the opportunity to comment.

Don Olsen AIA

Response # 6

Regarding Jackrabbit Lane in Bozeman, there has never been a roundabout on that route. The modern roundabout proposed in the EA would safely accommodate truck/trailer movements. By design, roundabouts are low speed intersections in all settings - highway and residential. The example in the EA was included because it has the same lane configuration as the concept proposed for the Airport intersection. (See also Exhibit B for web site addresses containing more information.)

As noted in the EA, the No-Build alternative for the Alkali Creek intersection fails to address the stated Purpose and Need for the proposed project. Several movements of the current intersection provide very poor level of service with today's traffic flows. This condition will only deteriorate further if no improvements are made, with or without the Aronson extension. Numerous alternatives and concepts were evaluated during the development of the design, and "Alkali Creek 2" is the only alternative that was able to satisfy the Purpose and Need for the proposed project.

Response # 7

Upon project approval, the final design will include landscaping for the Airport intersection, the Alkali Creek intersection, and limited treatments within the corridor. Landscaping is intended to consist of low maintenance, drought-tolerant species that will be maintained jointly by MDT and the City of Billings. MDT will take on the responsibility for anything that can be maintained with conventional maintenance equipment.

As noted on page 26 of the EA, a bike/pedestrian tunnel under North 27th Street is included in the proposed project that would connect the trail in Swords Park to the established paths on the western edge of the intersection. Pedestrian crossings will also be considered on the approach legs of the roundabout, as appropriate. The specific design for these crossings, as well as any additional crossings at Alkali Creek Road, will be completed during the final design effort.

Comment # 8

From: Laura Simonsen [lsimonsen@imt.net]
Sent: Wednesday, December 07, 2005 2:21 PM
To: mdteiscommentsblgair@mt.gov
Cc: djames@hkminc.com
Subject: Comment on Billings Airport Road EA

I am looking forward to the upgrading our famous "malfunction junction". It is very dangerous and traffic doesn't flow well.

I hope you will make it an attractive entrance into our city. Please keep in mind you will be able to see it from nearly every vantage point in Billings. With that, please don't over light it. So many new areas are putting in completely obnoxious and useless lighting. Just look at the intersection of Shiloh and Grand from the rims. It looks like we are putting on a football game it is so bright. Please use eye pleasing lights. Also, it would seem appropriate to use landscaping that is natural to this area and wouldn't require much water.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on this project.

Sincerely,

Laura Simonsen

Response # 8

Please see Comment/Response # 5 regarding the anticipated safety improvements.

Lighting can be an important safety aspect for intersection operations, however, the importance of aesthetic treatments has been noted throughout project development, and lighting concerns will be taken into consideration as the design progresses.

Please see Comment/Response # 7 regarding appropriate landscaping and maintenance.

Comment # 9

From: James R. Foley [jim@foleygroupinfo.com]
Sent: Friday, December 09, 2005 12:39 PM
To: mdtelcommentsblgair@mt.gov
Cc: djames@hkminc.com
Subject: Comment on Billings Airport Road EA

Gentleman,

This reconstruction project will be the first thing visitors see as they arrive and depart from Billings. Due to the importance of this project, it's impact upon the tourism industry and the visual impacts it will have on our local community I would like to stress that this project must not only be highly functional, but very aesthetically appealing. I do find the alternatives for at-grade roundabouts and intersections much more aesthetically appealing than the overpass alternatives. If projected traffic counts do not dictate overpasses I would recommend the at-grade alternatives.

To accomplish a high level of visual quality for the project, both appropriate cost estimates and design guidelines should be included in the initial Environmental Assessment. Without this, the final design may be under funded to accomplish a built project with a high aesthetic appeal. Individual items that should be analyzed include: Lighting, Landscaping, Pavement Materials and Signage/Graphics. It is my hope that the final design will include street lighting with reduced pole sizes and appropriate fixtures with a regional design theme. Also, this project would be a great opportunity to provide a street signage package that blends with the lighting design. This would be much more attractive than the standard highway department green signs on metal poles. Specialty pavement materials can provide texture, pattern and a sound that will slow traffic while enhancing the look and appeal of the intersections/roundabouts. While initial costs of these pavements are higher, long term maintenance costs are much lower and the aesthetic appeal is much higher. The landscape design should include a regionally appropriate theme with low water requirements. This approach will reduce long term maintenance, water costs and also give the project a regional identity rather than a over-watered golf course look.

Again, please include design standards and cost estimates that will guarantee that the final project is built with appealing and regionally appropriate landscape, lighting, pavement and signage. Thank you. Sincerely,

James R. Foley
Principal

Foley Group, LLC
100 N. 27th Street, Suite 450
Billings, MT 59101
Phone: 406-294-4477
Fax: 406-294-4478
email: jim@foleygroupinfo.com
website: www.foleygroupinfo.com

Response # 9

Specification of design guidelines are beyond the scope of a typical environmental analysis for a project of this type. The design elements suggested in this comment can be considered if the project proceeds to final design; however, the scope of improvements included in the final project will be limited by the funds available. Desired elements beyond those specifically designed to address the Purpose and Need for the project are in competition with a vast array of other necessary safety and capacity improvement projects across the state. At a minimum, signing, lighting, pavement material, and landscape design will comply with state and federal design guidelines.

Please see Comment/Response # 7 regarding appropriate landscaping.

Comment # 10

RECEIVED
DEC 16 2005
ENVIRONMENTALMASTER FILE
COPYBillings Airport Road
MT (9)
CN 4743

December 15, 2005

MDT Environmental Services
Attention: Jean Riley
PO Box 201001
Helena, MT 59620-1001


Re: Project Number MT (009) CN 4743

Dear Ms. Riley:

We were unable to attend the Public Hearing on November 30, 2005 for the stated project. However, I have attended previously and I want to re-state the concerns of myself, husband and neighbors that reside along the Rimrocks of Billings in the general vicinity of this project. We have great concern for the proposed work with regard to providing adequate drainage to ensure that water from resulting storms has a place to go other than our basements. I think a review of the claims filed for water damage by the homeowners after the 100 year rains in 1997 may give you insight in how changes made to the airport affected us. A complete set of photographs and documentary was supplied to Rep. Bohlinger at the time. Elevating roads and putting more asphalt or concrete on top of a rock surface is going to create problems – irregardless of what the airport engineers will tell you.

I appreciate the opportunity to express my concerns and hope that they will be seriously considered.

Best regards,


Wanda Anderson
3033 Ryniker Drive
Billings, MT 59102
Phone 245-0155

Response # 10

As part of the standard project development process, and in response to previously raised concerns, MDT has reviewed the drainage issues at the Airport intersection during preparation of the preliminary drainage plans for this proposed project. Upon project approval, the final design will connect to one of two City of Billings storm drain outfalls: the Airport trunk line to the north of the intersection, or the south of the intersection at Rimrock Road. A third possible solution is to carry the storm water in the roadside ditch down Airport Road to a point where it could discharge into the Alkali Creek drainage. Regardless of the eventual drainage outfall solution, some detention storage will be provided at the intersection, and all drainage designs will be completed in accordance with MDT hydraulic design standards.

Comment # 11

From: john eddy [ajeddy@bresnan.net]
Sent: Wednesday, December 21, 2005 7:32 AM
To: mdteiscommentsblgair@mt.gov
Cc: djames@hkminc.com
Subject: Comment on Billings Airport Road EA

I understand the logic of using a traffic circle; I have used them extensively in California and in Massachusetts. I feel that the degree of confusion will far outweigh the cost savings. To be blunt, you would be expecting people, that in large part, can't use freeway onramps effectively to now use a circle. Who would have the right of way: those going on, or those going off? After the third time around without getting off, it won't matter because they will just turn the wheel and go. The Army Street traffic circle in San Francisco was always having accidents. The circles in Massachusetts kept changing who had the right of way and then even people who had used them correctly just went, devil take the hindmost.

I have to say that traffic circles are bad ideas, they save money up front and cost the users in accidents and frustration.

A. John Eddy
502 Luther Circle
Billings, MT
59102

Comment # 12

-----Original Message-----

From: www@mdt.mt.gov [<mailto:www@mdt.mt.gov>]
Sent: Wednesday, December 21, 2005 10:06 AM
To: MDT Comments - Project
Subject: Comment on a Project Submitted

A question, comment or request has been submitted via the "Contact Us" web page.

Action Item:	Comment on a Project
Submitted:	12/21/2005 10:05:51
Project Commenting On:	Billings Airport Intesection

Comment or Question:

I am very strongly opposed to the plan to install a traffic circle (roundabout) at the Billings airport intersection. Having lived in Washington, D. C., I am very familiar with traffic circles and the confusion, congestion and chaos they cause. They might have been fine for horse and buggy days but make no sense in a situation involving heavy traffic and large vehicles. Sincerely, Neil G. Schlaeppi, 6606 Grand Ave, Billings, Montana 59106. 406-656-4319

Response # 11

The design for the Airport intersection is for a modern roundabout, not a traffic circle. (Please refer to Exhibit B.) A modern roundabout requires all entering traffic to yield to circulating traffic, has slow entering and circulating speeds (less than 30 mph), and consists of a small diameter circle (less than 200 feet). A traffic circle requires circulating traffic to yield to entering traffic, operates at higher speeds (greater than 30 mph), and consists of large diameter circles (greater than 300 feet).

Please also refer to Exhibit B for discussions on modern roundabout safety and accident history.

See also Comment/Response # 4 above regarding signing and striping for the modern roundabout.

Response # 12

See Comment/Response # 11 above.

Comment # 13

From: Jack Knorr [rbdept@montana.net]
Sent: Wednesday, December 21, 2005 7:56 AM
To: mdteiscommentsblgair@mt.gov
Cc: djames@hkminc.com
Subject: Comment on Billings Airport Road EA

To Whom It may Concern:
I believe that the design of a round-about for the intersection at the airport is a great idea. These designs are used in Europe extensively and work to everyone's advantage.

J.F.Knorr
Supt. Road and Bridges
Stillwater County
Columbus, Mt

Comment # 14

From: Kim Olsen [kim@olsenarch.com]
Sent: Wednesday, December 21, 2005 4:09 PM
To: mdteiscommentsblgair@mt.gov
Cc: djames@hkminc.com
Subject: Comment on Billings Airport Road EA

I am writing regarding the environmental assessment for the project to reconstruct the intersection at the airport and 27th street in Billings, Montana. Under the Item E Mitigation commitments - I would like to emphasize the importance of the aesthetic treatment concepts. The rimrocks are the community's defining geological feature. This project will be located on the city's major north south arterial. It is the gateway of our community both from the airport and the interstate. It is a major visual element from our downtown. All elements impacting the visual aesthetics should be reviewed not only in terms of the project area but how it impacts the view from the elements all along 27th street. Consideration should be paid to what it does to the viewshed of MSU-B, the hospital, the city core and all the way to the 27th street exit.
Thank you for this opportunity to comment.

Response # 13

Comment noted. No response necessary.

Response # 14

The importance of aesthetic treatments has been noted throughout project development. Upon project approval, the final design will include landscaping for the Airport intersection, the Alkali Creek intersection, and limited treatments within the corridor.

Comment # 15

December 20, 2005

Montana Department of Transportation
P.O. Box 201001
Helena, MT 59620-1001

RE: Airport Road improvement project

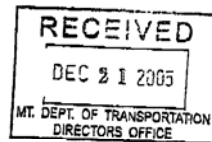
Dear Department,

In response to calls for public input please consider the follow as our comments.

1. We feel that a right turn lane on Airport Road into Swords Park will be of great benefit to park users. Without such an improvement access to the park will be a risk to public health and safety as traffic counts rise and park use expands. We feel this is a critical concern.
2. We are concerned that public utilities be stubbed into Swords Park property. The time will come when Swords Park, the largest of City of Billings parks, the most diverse geographically and historically and the park most centrally located within the city limits of Billings, will require services within its boundaries. It seems that at this time of major construction presents a unique opportunity to accomplish the task of bringing those public utilities to the park. Such work at this time will allow for orderly park development with little or no impact upon the road work about to be undertaken on Airport Road.

Thank you very much for the opportunity to address these concerns.

Sincerely,

Chas. G. Vegen
President, Foundation Board
Yellowstone County Museum**Response # 15**

The City of Billings raised the issue of stubbing in utilities with MDT in the summer of 2005. Upon project approval, MDT will take this request into consideration as the project goes into final design. Such inclusion would not affect the findings in the EA and can be adequately addressed during this later stage of the project development process.